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17 MARCH 1980ASPIN BILL PROVIDES
TIGHTER C.I.A. REINWisconsin Democrat Seeks More
Congressional Oversight With
Relief From Some CurbsBy CHARLES MOHR
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 16 — One of the Congressmen responsible for overseeing the Central Intelligence Agency argues that, contrary to assertions by other legislators and President Carter, existing laws and regulations have neither hindered a continuing program of covert operations abroad nor seriously compromised agency secrets.

The Congressman, Representative Les Aspin, Democrat of Wisconsin, said he would introduce legislation tomorrow that would strengthen, rather than weaken, "the Congressional tether on the intelligence community." At the same time, he asserted that his bill would give the C.I.A. relief from some onerous restraints and requirements.

In a speech prepared for delivery tomorrow in the House, Mr. Aspin said he was offering his bill as an alternative to two bills pending in the Senate.

The proposal by Mr. Aspin, chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of the House Intelligence Committee and a specialist in defense policy, is in marked contrast to some other measures meant to "unleash" the intelligence agencies and to remove what President Carter has asserted are "unwarranted" restraints on the agencies.

Mr. Aspin said in his prepared speech that myths and "false issues" had distorted debate on Congressional oversight of the C.I.A. and other intelligence activities and contributed to pressures to relax such oversight.

To Avoid 'Good Old Days'

He said his proposed bill, the Intelligence Activities Act of 1980, was meant to "prevent a return to the 'good old days' that proved to be an embarrassment to us as a nation while at the same time recognizing that our intelligence services cannot be expected to operate in a fishbowl."

Other proposed bills are aimed at demolishing the so-called Hughes-Ryan amendment of 1974, which, in conjunction with Congressional rules, has theoretically permitted the full membership of eight Congressional committees to hear the intelligence agency's reports on covert operations. Advocates of such change have argued that, by increasing the risk of unauthorized disclosure, the law has hindered covert acts meant to influence the course or outcome of events abroad.

"But where are all these leaks supposedly caused by Hughes-Ryan?" Mr. Aspin asked. "We are doing a fair amount of covert operations now and have been for some time; they are not being leaked."

The argument that present law had "crippled" American foreign policy is fallacious, he added, "since covert actions continue daily."

Finds Distortion on Reporting

He also contended that there had been gross distortion in descriptions of how the Hughes-Ryan reporting system actually worked. Instead of hundreds of members of Congress being privy to clandestine operations, he maintained that in practice only 27 members of the House, 19 Senators and 17 staff members of the two bodies received such reports.

Arguing that this was "not an unreasonable number," he added, "The key to avoiding covert action disasters is the assurance that a cross section of people will consider" such operations.

"A number of covert actions blew up in our faces in the past because they were terrible ideas to begin with," he said. "They were put together by a handful of true believers who prevented anyone who might question their judgment from having a say."

His bill would provide that two members from "appropriate" committees other than the two intelligence panels continue to receive briefings on covert operations. The House and Senate would make their own rules on this matter, but under current practices, this would involve six members from each house belonging to the Foreign Relations, Armed Services and Appropriations Committees in each chamber.

These 12, added to the 27 members of the two intelligence committees, would make 39 members of Congress eligible for briefings on covert actions.

For Prior Notification

Mr. Aspin's legislation would also flatly require, without apparent exception, prior notification to Congress of all covert actions, as well as "full" and complete notification of all other intelligence information.

The Carter Administration and the C.I.A. have strongly opposed a proposal by Senator Walter D. Huddleston, Democrat of Kentucky, that would mandate prior notification, even to a limited number of Congressional figures. A senior intelligence official said last week that the Aspin bill was even less acceptable to the C.I.A.

Mr. Aspin's speech was clearly intended to try to offset arguments that measures taken several years ago to curb excesses and illegalities by the intelligence services had gone too far and were now somehow impeding an effective intelligence effort.

However, his bill may generate little support, in the view of some House sources. He would flatly prohibit the use of clergymen, journalists and professors as spies and their institutions as "cover" for the C.I.A. He would also refuse to exempt the agency, as it wishes to be, from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Instead, the bill would protect foreign information sources in the agency's files from being divulged by requests made under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Aspin bill appeared to be somewhat more restrictive than Senator Huddleston's proposed National Intelligence Act, which is meant to create a "charter" for the intelligence community. Mr. Aspin called the Huddleston bill too complex to be passed this year. He said of a measure by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, is designed to give the C.I.A. relief from what it calls onerous burdens, that it was an "excessively simple" proposal that would be a step backward.